

# South Carolina's **FACES** of Adult Education

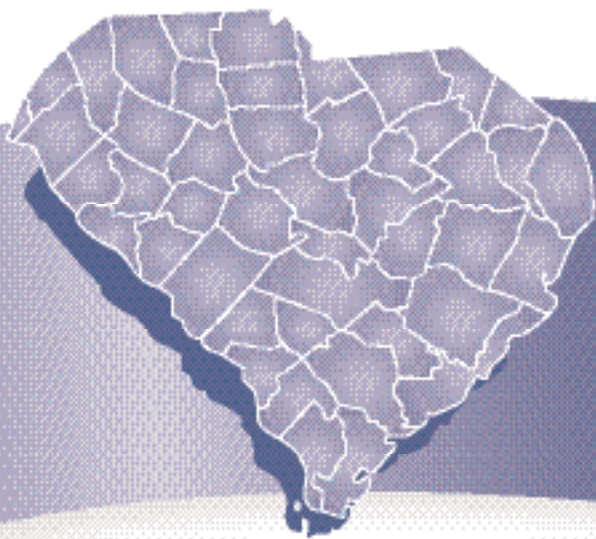


Adult  
EDUCATION

**2005-06 ANNUAL REPORT OF PROGRESS**

Office of Adult and Community Education

South Carolina Department of Education



You'll see their  
faces in every  
South Carolina  
community...

### ...THE 64,520 STUDENTS

who can be teenagers, retirees and in between. Statewide, about 57 percent are women. About 9,400 are of Hispanic or other heritage besides white and African-American. More than 7,200 don't speak English as their first language. Their goals are many—get a better job or just get a job, obtain high school credentials, learn English, improve their basic literacy skills.

### ...THE INSTRUCTORS

who teach basic courses, preparation for GED exams, computer and technology classes, workplace skills, and family literacy programs. Of the almost 2,000 teachers, 53 percent are volunteers with the rest certified full-time or part-time educators.

### ...DIRECTORS & STAFFERS

for 57 programs across the state, along with educators at state and local levels, who coordinate with government agencies, technical colleges, and community organizations to ensure that students receive the instruction they desire to achieve their goals.

## THESE ARE THE FACES OF ADULT EDUCATION IN SOUTH CAROLINA.

Every student has a dream. Every instructor can tell success stories. Every administrator feels a sense of pride when the system meets a student's need. Humming along month by month all year long, adult education is in a constant delivery mode. As you will see in this annual report, lots of people rely on it. Meet some of the faces that make adult education personal.

# On a fast track to the future.

JOSH STROMAN, GED GRADUATE

**EVEN BEFORE HE TURNED 17,** Joshua Stroman realized he had to get his young life back on track, and adult education helped him do just that.

Dropping out of high school was a result, as Josh described it, of “hanging with friends who didn’t have my best interests at heart.” Coming to his senses, despite being estranged from his immediate family at the time, he ended up at Richland School District One’s Adult and Community Education office.

He was on a mission to take the GED exam but found out he was just shy of age 17, the minimum age to sit for the test. But first things first—he began classes with instructor William Barksdale to prepare for the exam. That, he said, was the encouragement he needed to turn things around.

“Mr. Barksdale influenced me greatly,” Josh said. “I had always liked school but he helped me really learn the material and be confident of everything I needed to know to take the GED.”

In late 2002, at age 17, Josh took the test and passed on the first try. He laughs, though, remembering the math. “Now, that was something to get through! I’m glad I have that behind me.”

College was next on his list. His youthful energy barreled him into technical college in 2003, but he left eventually. “I wasn’t disciplined, that’s what it was,” he flatly declared. “I wasn’t used to constant studying, testing, studying.”

Working part-time, he was staying with an aunt in Columbia then—a blessing, he sees now. “I had strong support there, and she encouraged me to do good, work hard and see what I could accomplish.”

So, in 2004, he rededicated himself to his education, with his aunt cheering all the way. “I looked at applying to several local colleges, determined I was going to make it. I knew I had put all those bad days of high school behind me, and I was moving on.” Relationships with his family were on the mend as well.

Then the oddest thing happened, Josh recalled. “I happened to meet the scholarship director for the United Negro College Fund, and he told me about a scholarship the fund had, called ‘Funds For a Brighter Future.’” Benedict College was among the eligible colleges for scholarship recipients, so he applied to Benedict.

“One day I went by the financial aid building to check on my paperwork and see what my status was with the scholarship, and I found out that I had been accepted,” he said. “That was the happiest day of my life!”

In fall 2004, Josh was a freshman living on the Benedict campus. He chose political science as his major and offers a thoughtful perspective on the field: “It’s not just about helping people. It’s also about making good decisions for a community. I see where some elected people can make strong arguments to persuade voters to support them, using charisma and a persuasive manner, but then they don’t make decisions to benefit their community.”

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JOSH STROMAN

This conflict between effective and ineffective public servants “fascinates” him and caused him to choose that major.

Josh jumped on an intern opportunity as a sophomore in 2005 to work in a community organizing capacity for the engineering company of Wilbur Smith and Associates, helping with the community issues surrounding the building of Interstate 73 to Myrtle Beach.

After that internship, he served as youth director for Crescent Hill Baptist Church, coordinating service projects with local charities and leading Bible studies.

Earlier in 2006, he would be dealt another lucky hand. “A friend of mine at Benedict, also a political science major, was working for the Columbia Urban League. She heard about the internship program at the Governor’s Office and suggested that I would be a great candidate,” he said with obvious appreciation. “So I forwarded my resume, and figured that was that.”

In three days, he was contacted, went to an interview and was hired. In a head-spinning turnaround, he started work within the week, helping to monitor media coverage, attend press briefings and evaluate issues.

“I used to ride by the State House years ago and say, ‘one day I’m gonna work there,’” he acknowledges. “Who knew I really would? When I walk through the halls, through the gray columns, and see the portraits of famous leaders on the wall, I am so inspired.”

When not working three days a week in the Governor’s Office, he is going to class and serving as a Benedict student body vice president. He and his friend who recommended him for the internship have co-founded a student organization called CHANGE—Creating Healthy Awareness Now for Growth Exponential—to help political science majors “hone their craft” by increasing awareness of current events, applying their field to the real world and encouraging them to participate in internships and other programs.

At 21, Josh sees graduate school in his future—this from a young man who just a few years ago didn’t have high school credentials. Where? “I would love to go to Cambridge,” he says hopefully, noting that attending Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government would be the ultimate dream come true.

“I would tell anyone who dropped out to go back to adult education and stick with it. It’s worth all the hard work in the end,” Josh said. \*

*I used to ride by the  
State House years ago  
and say, ‘one day I’m  
gonna work there....’*

# Serving up some fresh-learned English.

SERKAN VURANAY, HORRY ESL STUDENT

**WHEN SERKAN VURANAY ARRIVED IN MYRTLE BEACH** from his native Turkey in 1999, he planned to help his sister as she got through some serious medical problems and then return home. Long story short, his sister is now doing just fine, and Serkan happily is still here.

When Serkan arrived, he could not speak one word of English. Today, he is the proprietor of a growing business near the beach. So how did he make so much progress? Without hesitation, he credits English as a Second Language (ESL) classes offered through Horry County Schools.

"When I came here, I could not understand any English," he said. "My sister's husband has a restaurant, and when I went there I tried to listen to what customers would say and how to say it. It wasn't enough. I wanted to learn in an organized way."

His brother-in-law told him about the ESL courses, and he began right away. "The easy part was speaking and understanding, but the grammar was hard! I had to really study. Idioms have been the hardest for me," Serkan said. "I picked up every newspaper, book, magazine, you name it, to read and learn. When I read and understood something, I was so happy."

His two ESL teachers, Maggie Oehlschlager and Dell Ruben, at the Socastee Adult Education Center worked with him over the next few years. He started out attending five mornings a week. "Once I started learning, I didn't want to stop. And everyone there was so friendly and helpful. I just kept going."

But his visa would eventually run out, and then he would have to go home. "My sister encouraged me to please stay, so I got my visa extended. My brother-in-law sponsored my work authorization application so I could help at his restaurant." Serkan was settling in, and three and a half years after applying, he received his green card that provided him with permanent work authorization.

He wanted to gain more experience in the restaurant business, so he worked next with a pizza franchise and then with a fine dining restaurant at a local resort. "All the time, I am practicing my English and learning how everything operates in this business," he added.

Earlier in 2006, his dream came true. He opened Milano's Restaurant, serving Mediterranean, Italian and Greek fare not far from Surfside Beach. Anyone for pizza, pasta, eggplant parmesan, manicotti, salads? Not only can Serkan serve you these delicious dishes, but he can pronounce, read and write their names and descriptions in English. An impossibility seven years ago!

"Things are going well so far. I am trying to get established here with advertising, good service and,

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SERKAN VURANAY

## *Once I started learning, I didn't want to stop.*

of course, good food," he says modestly. "I want customers to be happy and tell their friends."

When asked what is the best thing about America, he immediately responds, "More opportunity, more freedom. If you work hard, you can do whatever you want. All

the people here have been so friendly, especially like my neighbors. That's helped so much."

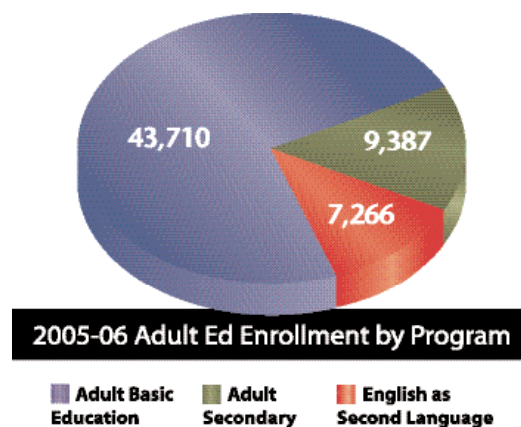
His ESL classes offered an additional benefit beyond teaching him English—he met a special young lady in class several years ago who has turned out to be his girlfriend. And she is from Poland!

Next on his agenda is taking the GED exam to qualify for future college classes (although he completed several years of college in Turkey). But for now, all his time is focused on making a success out of his business. Maybe he'll go back to Turkey for a visit sometime as well.

You might say his hometown of Adana, Turkey, has a few things in common with Horry County. Adana, Turkey's fourth largest city, is located on a river and near the sea—the Mediterranean—while Horry is one of the state's fastest growing regions and proud of its location by the Intercoastal Waterway and the Atlantic. Both attract tourists, with Adana being situated near ancient historic sites.

"Whenever I talk to anyone who is considering going to English class, I tell them they can do anything here if they will learn English. They will do better work and have a better life if they learn more about the culture. Adult education can help them do whatever they want."

Next time you're headed to the Grand Strand, stop by Milano's, off State Road 544 between Conway and Surfside, for lunch or supper. Be sure to strike up a conversation with the owner. He'll appreciate it. \*





# She's all about relevance.

TARA SMITH, SUMTER-LEE ADULT EDUCATION TEACHER

**WHEN STUDENTS CAN IDENTIFY WITH** a subject matter, they have more reasons to learn it and retain it. That's Tara Smith's approach to teaching her adult learners, and it works.

She has taught classes in the ESOL program—"my baby," she says—for Sumter-Lee Adult Education the past three years. "Remember, these are adults. Most of them come to me after working all day at a job. Who wants to sit still in a classroom, especially if it doesn't seem relevant?" Tara said. "If they can't identify with what they are asked to do, learning becomes a task and is not enjoyed."

In her English literacy class, she asked her students to read novels from a series she had discovered and write book reports so she could see how their reading and writing skills were progressing. She noted that her class included 18-year-olds, grandparents and in between.

"They wouldn't put the books down!" she exclaimed. "They did so well on their essays, and I think it was because they could identify with the characters and the challenges they were facing. I was so excited that I wrote the publishing company to tell them how successful this activity had been. The company then sent me 50 novels for free!"

When her class held a poetry contest, she arranged for the winner to get a book store gift certificate. Journal writing is another popular activity and works especially well in classes with a variety of proficiency levels, she has found.

She is a big believer in assessments but adds her own touch to testing. "I always ask my students to do self-assessments. I ask, 'What do you want to achieve? Where do you want to be when you complete this class?'"

However, Tara conducts her self-assessments one-on-one with students, orally. "You know, paper can frighten people," she pointed out, especially for students like hers. "I want them to think about what they want to achieve and have goals."

Where does she get all her teaching ideas? She chuckles when she explained she majored in sociology (degree from Morris College) and that is a "study of human behavior." She said she can recognize fear and worry, for example, in her students so she can help adapt lessons and activities to suit what they need to learn and lessen their concerns about classroom work.

"If they like soccer, we go to the soccer field and sit and read about soccer players. We work math problems on the field measurements and do whatever I can work in that's relevant," she said.

She also calls on colleagues out of state to "tap their brains" and ask what works there. She embraces research (an important aspect of sociology, she added) to find new ways of teaching.



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**\* DID YOU KNOW? In 2005-06, a total of 7,266 non-English speaking students were**



TARA SMITH

Now, she is a trainer of other teachers through Division 2 of the Regional Adult Education Technical Assistance Center (RAETAC). However, she couldn't let go of teaching adult learners—she teaches “Mommy and Me” family literacy classes on Saturdays to mostly Hispanic women who want to improve their communication skills.

*I ask, ‘what do you want to achieve?’*

Many people think of ESL students having very limited education, Tara noted, but that is not always the case. “Awhile back, I taught a lady who had been a professional salesperson in Mexico and had moved here with her family. Her English language proficiency was the only thing lacking for her to go into the workforce. Imagine how we would be if we moved to another country, and the only thing holding us back was speaking the language.”

Tara understands her students in a personal way. She started college years ago but life intervened, and she did not finish her degree until just a few years ago. “I know what it’s like to be a non-traditional student myself. When adult learners are comfortable learning, they can do anything.” \*

## Now the dictionaries stay home.

OLGA PRINCE, SUMTER-LEE ESL STUDENT

**LEARNING ENGLISH IN RUSSIA** is a lot different than learning English in America, especially with all the dialects and accents to be encountered. Just ask Olga Prince, who moved here from her hometown of Ryazan near Moscow to Sumter in early 2005 when she got married.

“There is very different pronunciation, and at first I didn’t understand,” she said with a lilting accent. “But I have had good teaching, and I’m very happy to understand more and more.” This year, Olga received one of Sumter-Lee Adult Education’s “Student of Excellence” awards for her tremendous progress.

Olga began English classes in April 2005 at the Sumter-Lee County Adult Education program housed at the Sumter Career Readiness System Center. She has been attending classes four mornings a week, now at the intermediate level, and likes learning new words and trying to pronounce them.

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OLGA PRINCE

*There is very different  
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understand.*

The examination on counting money was a particularly tough one for her, she recalled.

"I will read and say to myself, 'I know this word' but I forgot," she said with a laugh about the slow process of learning a new language. Not to mention how many English words sound the same but are spelled differently!"

Even so, she has persevered with the help of her two teachers so far, Sue Owens and Jean Dumiak, who she credits as being patient and caring. "And my husband, Jimmy," she added. "Every night, he helps with my homework, checking it."

He can see the progress she is making, too. "We used to leave the house with two dictionaries and an electronic translator I ordered for her on the internet," he said. "Now, we don't have to do that at all. She understands so much more."

Even her father-in-law assists, as he gets her to class and back while Jimmy works.

Olga said her goal is to improve her English so that she is more comfortable reading and writing. She hopes one day to take the state exam to work as a nail technician, the work she did in Russia, but that will require a little more proficiency in English.

"I like it here a lot," she said about living in South Carolina. "But it is too hot here sometimes," a sentiment that most South Carolinians would agree with. She has visited Myrtle Beach and Charleston since moving to Sumter.

Olga's mother remains in Russia, but Olga has already met a Russian family living in Sumter with whom she gets to share memories of home. She mentioned that here "everybody smiles, says hello and asks how you are doing, and I like that." \*



# A portrait of success.

KATHY FLYNN, GED GRADUATE

**IF YOU CALL KATHY FLYNN AT HOME** in the evenings, you'll have to leave a message with her husband. She won't be there.

She's taking more classes at Greenville Technical College to get another certification toward a medical career. She has come a long way since dropping out of school after 8th grade about 35 years ago, all because she wanted to work full-time so she could buy a car.

She got married at age 17 and soon found herself working in a textile mill. "You didn't have to have a high school diploma to work there," she acknowledged. Thirty some-odd years later, in January 2005, a changing economy shut down her last employer.

"When they told us about the plant closing, they said the Trade Act of 2002 would help pay for us to go back to school. I went to the Workforce Development office while I was drawing unemployment and looking for a job, and I was told to check with the Greenville Literacy Association. I thought that was only for people who couldn't read, not for me," Kathy said.

She found out that Greenville Literacy offered a variety of classes, so she took the placement test. With only a \$10 registration fee, she decided to begin classes immediately. Kathy enrolled in English (to work on essay writing), math, science and social studies pre-GED groups for six months.

"I had great teachers! They were all volunteers who were patient and helpful. They built my confidence," she said. In October 2005, she drove to Hillcrest High School and sat for the GED exam. She passed on the first try.

"Then I had to decide what I wanted to be," she laughed. "My college courses would be paid for if I decided to do that, and I had been thinking about the medical field."

Earlier this year, Kathy successfully completed the patient care technician program at Greenville Tech, passed her board exam and got her certified nurse assistant (CNA) license. That wasn't enough school, she decided. She was finding that she was a capable, successful student.

Now she is working diligently on anatomy and medical terminology classes with the goal of being certified as an EKG technician. Next comes training for being a medical receptionist, a position that will give her those all-important office management skills. Kathy hopes to wrap all this training together and work at a doctor's office, maybe at a heart center to use her EKG training.

Make no mistake—Kathy didn't just whiz through her recent schooling, but her biggest obstacles likely were in her own head. Could she make it? She had been out of school for all those years. She cringed at the



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KATHY FLYNN

thought of being in class with “all those young kids who would be smarter and faster.” She was sure she would make the worst grades in the class.

It wasn’t anything like that. “It was wonderful! I didn’t think I could do it, but by the grace of God I did. If you put your mind to it, you can do it,” she said of her fears. She even gave the graduation speech when she received her Patient Care Technician (PCT) certification and was humbled by the large showing of family and friends. She salutes her family for their unwavering support.

To showcase her progress, Kathy is putting together a “school scrapbook” with her certificates, letters and photos. “My grandchildren will be able to see what I accomplished, and I hope they will be inspired that they can do anything, too.” \*

*My grandchildren will  
be able to see what  
I’ve accomplished.*

## It’s learning, not competition.

TANYA SCHAFFER, GED GRADUATE

**IT REALLY DOES PAY TO LISTEN TO YOUR SUPERVISOR**, and Tanya Schaffer will be the first to vouch for that. A couple of years ago, Tanya was working as a cashier in a Charleston County School District cafeteria where over time she had accumulated many responsibilities but did not qualify for management without high school credentials.

“My supervisor, Cassandra Tucker, was at my cafeteria one day, and she told me that she noticed I had taken over a lot of work,” the mother of four and grandmother of five said. “She said, ‘I think you ought to get your GED and be a cafeteria manager.’”

That got Tanya to thinking. She found out that she could attend classes at the Rivergate Adult Education Center in North Charleston at no charge. “Free? I couldn’t beat that,” she said. From March-June 2005, she hit the books.

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**\* DID YOU KNOW? 36,634 females were enrolled in SC Adult Education in 2005-06.**





TANYA SCHAFFER

*I was there for me.  
For me, not for  
anybody else.*

The most challenging part was working all day and then going straight to class, she remembered. Some days she was discouraged, and some of her fellow students even

dropped out. "I remember one day a project was assigned, and the younger students in the class were jumping up as if they were ready to go with it," she said with a sigh.

"Then it hit me. I was there for me. For me, not for anybody else," she declared. "Going back to school was not a competition. What I achieved, I was doing just for me. The rate of speed was not important."

That June, she took and passed the GED exam. At the graduation ceremony in December, she was the speaker. "After all these years, I finally feel complete," she said in her remarks. "I was one of seven children and the only one who didn't graduate from high school. And now, my youngest child is about to graduate from high school. Think about how you would feel knowing your youngest is about to graduate, and you still haven't gotten your own diploma."

Earlier this year, she did her cafeteria management training for three months at Buist Academy, an academic magnet school serving 400 K-8 students in downtown Charleston. She then finished out the school year at another school. This summer, she got a call asking her to come back to Buist to be the cafeteria manager.

"I already knew the school and the kids, so since I was familiar with it, it was a great thing to come back here," she said.

This past year, she has served as the president of the Food and Nutrition Association of Charleston, an organization of school food professionals that also undertakes community service projects.

She pointed out that she always emphasized the value of education to her children and grandchildren, and now she is called upon to encourage others in her field to follow her lead.

"I tell them it is achievable. They have to have the fortitude to be successful, and if I can do it, they can. They need to look at the future, not at the moment, to see how important education will be to them. It's not a competition with others. Education is a lifelong achievement." \*



# Teaching the teachers.

CHARAN LEE, ADULT ED DIRECTOR, ANDERSON 1&2

## CHARAN LEE IS FOCUSED ON RESULTS.

The adult education director for Anderson Districts 1 and 2 since 1989, Charan has been involved with adult education since she started teaching GED students in Greenville in 1973. There's not much she hasn't seen in andragogy—a term to describe the teaching of adults.

When the GED exam went through major revisions in 2002, she knew that the students would do better on the test if the teachers were more prepared to teach the material the new exam covered. Discussions began about the need for increased training, and in 2003 the GED Teacher Academy was established through her leadership and the guidance of Dr. Cherry Daniel, state director of adult and community education.

The 45-hour College of Charleston course, taught over eight days, is offered each summer in Charleston, and at least once a year in another region of the state. A maximum of 30 participants are accepted, and they can be full-time or part-time adult education instructors in their respective school districts.

By offering the Academy, the Office of Adult and Community Education expects to enhance the quality of instruction for GED students, increase the number of South Carolinians who pass the test, increase recruitment and retention rates in adult education, and position adult education to be the most efficient and effective GED instructional program in the state.

"At the academy, we look at what it means to be an 'adult learner,'" Charan said. "Adults come to education with different goals and expectations, and teachers must work with these adult learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses and help them set realistic goals."

"In the academy, we demonstrate a variety of strategies for teaching adults and provide tools to help the instructors manage their classes effectively. We also help them become proficient in the five areas that the GED covers and encourage them to explore creative methods of teaching the required skills."

One assignment for the teachers participating in the Academy is to actually take the Official GED Practice test. Participants also create GED lesson plans which are presented to the class as part of the training. Selected lessons are posted on the [scaetac.org](http://scaetac.org) website so teachers across the state can access them," Charan noted.

So has this training been worth it? "We have seen Anderson 1 and 2's pass rate increase to 84 percent this year," she gave as an example.

The academy has had some additional benefits, such as helping teachers understand how to work with special needs students. "For instance, teachers can encourage students with attention deficit problems to take



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**\* DID YOU KNOW? 18% of South Carolina's total high school credentials in 2005-06 were**



Charan Lee

*We look at what  
it means to be an  
'adult learner.'*

the GED in segments rather than in one day." Students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or 504 plans can apply for accommodations on the GED test as well.

The 2002 GED tests were normed by administering them to graduating high school seniors across the United States to ensure that the skills and knowledge of the GED tests were comparable to that of traditional graduating 12th graders. The GED passing score is set so that approximately 42 percent of high school seniors are unable to pass the tests. "Clearly, passing the GED is no breeze," Charan pointed out.

"Adult Education teachers in South Carolina are getting so good at teaching the GED," Charan said with her characteristic enthusiasm. "We tell students that if they come and stay with us long enough to complete their studies, we can get them through the GED. Adult Education's goal is to be 'THE' GED provider in South Carolina. Check us out—we're good!" \*

Never too late.

SARAH McLAUGHLIN, GED GRADUATE

**IT WAS A MOMENTOUS DAY** at Sarah McLaughlin's house in Florence when the big brown envelope arrived in the mail last December.

That would be the envelope with her 8" x 10" GED diploma, declaring that she indeed had passed the exam she took a few weeks earlier. "My husband called me at work and told me the envelope had come," Sarah remembered. "I asked him to open it, and he said there were a lot of papers inside. Then he found the diploma and said, 'Sarah, you passed.'"

But Sarah of course knew that. She had taken the exam three times in 2005 and missed passing by a few points the first and second tries. The third time was indeed the charm. "It was the math that was so hard," she said. "I knew coming down the hall to the elevator after the third time I took it that I had passed. I just knew I'd aced it."

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SARAH McLAUGHLIN

*It will be the best thing you've ever done for yourself.*

Aced it at age 67, no less.

The OneStop program got her on the right track to the GED, and the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) "paid everything for me to go

back to school," she said in appreciation. She could tell, from the first day she walked into the Poynor Adult and Community Education Center, the experience was going to be positive.

"I loved every minute of my classes and all of my teachers," she declared of her three years at the Poynor Center. "I couldn't have asked for better teachers."

She specifically recognized Sandy Wright, Sarah Bryant and Eve Bell who had meant so much to her as she returned to school after 40 years working in a garment factory that closed.

At her graduation ceremony in May, held at Francis Marion University, Sarah was the speaker. "I won't ever forget that day. I thanked everyone who had supported me and told them how hard I had worked to get there. When I told them that the third time I took the exam I aced it, the whole auditorium started applauding and cheering."

Sarah believes that if she can do it, anyone can. "With determination, you can do it. I have arthritis in my right knee, and some days it was hurting so bad I didn't want to go to class, but I did."

Her husband, sisters and brothers all supported her in her efforts. Not a boastful lady, Sarah is still proud of her accomplishments but cites her Christian faith for helping her get through it all.

And if passing the exam to graduate wasn't enough, Sarah also is a member of the National Adult Education Honor Society, being nominated by her teachers for her outstanding schoolwork, attitude and accomplishments.

Sarah works as the afternoon receptionist at the Leatherman Senior Center and Senior Citizens Association in Florence. Part of her job includes calling local seniors who live alone with no family to check on them, a responsibility she loves and for which she has been praised by her superiors who cite her caring attitude and dedicated service.

What advice would she give others considering a return to school? "It will be the best thing you've ever done for yourself," she said emphatically. "It will open doors for you and open your mind to things you never dreamed possible.

"Go back and get that GED. It will give you a whole new outlook on life," Sarah said. \*



# Perseverance pays.

TASHUNDRA WILLIAMS, HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA GRADUATE

**ONCE SHE DECIDED TO RETURN TO SCHOOL** after dropping out during 10th grade, Tashundra Williams kept her eye on the goal of 24 credits. That's how many she needed to have to receive her high school diploma, and credit by credit over six years she did it.

The mother of a son when she was 15, she said she simply "just stopped going to school. I wasn't on a program like welfare so I had to work. I've been working ever since because I've been on my own since age 18."

*I told her that education is the key to success.*

The value of education became apparent about the time she would have graduated from C.A. Johnson High School in

Columbia. "That got me thinking about going back, and everybody said 'oh, just go take the test and get your GED.'"

But then strange things kept happening, she recalled, every time she went to take the test. "I was late once and couldn't start, I had transportation trouble another time, I just couldn't seem to get to the exam," she said.

So she took it as a sign to work instead on her high school diploma, and that meant she had to complete all the coursework—the rest of those 24 credits she hadn't earned—just like a traditional student.

At the time, the C.R. Neal Center was temporarily located at Eau Claire High School, so that's where Tashundra started. Her second child came along, but she managed to continue taking classes, off and on, while keeping a job.

She participated for 10 months with City Year Columbia, the local service organization, which expected participants to have a GED or high school diploma. She finished her class work for the last of those 24 credits at the end of 2005, sat for the exit exam and shortly after was the proud possessor of that long-awaited diploma.

If you think school is over for this young mom (her third child was born in the past year), not hardly. She is enrolled at Midlands Technical College to become a dental hygienist, meanwhile working two jobs and mothering three youngsters from age 10 down to a baby.

"My mother, sister and brother really encouraged me about going back to school," she said appreciatively. "And now I am encouraging others. I was speaking with a young lady not long ago, and I told her that education is the key to success. I told her I was young like her once and didn't think it mattered all that much. But it does. Oh, how it does." \*



**\* DID YOU KNOW? 1,961 diplomas were earned through SC Adult Education in 2005-06.**



# Family matters.

CHILD & FAMILY DEVELOPMENT CENTER, NORTH CHARLESTON

**EDUCATORS KNOW THAT A CHILD HAS** a greater chance to be successful in school if his or her family possesses some literacy skills and embraces learning. Sounds reasonable, but what happens when a family's skills are lacking? By the time the child reaches school age, a crucial window of opportunity for a strong educational beginning is closing.

Enter programs like the Child and Family Development Center in North Charleston. This center offers a variety of classes and programs for both adults and children under its roof.

"The family literacy component of adult education is the most supportive model that we can offer parents to continue their schooling," said Dr. Martha Watson, the center's director. Two of the strongest predictors of a child's school readiness and success, she notes from research, are the mother's educational level and the number of vocabulary words the child hears in the early years of life.

In its sixth year of operation, the center draws families from an area with a number of schools receiving funds through Title I, the largest source of federal school funding that is based on poverty levels. "We have found that 63 percent of the parents in our area are not high school graduates, so that means we have many needs to serve right around us," she said.

The center serves families through parenting skills programs, parent-child interaction events, infant and preschool early childhood education programs and adult education classes.

For example, the adult education curriculum includes classes in language arts, reading/writing, math, social studies and science, and instruction is delivered in both small groups and individual settings by a full-time instructor, Monday-Friday mornings. A GED goal plan is personalized to fit the educational needs of each student. Last year, 43 participated.

Meanwhile, children of these adults, along with other preschoolers in the area who qualify, are happily learning and playing just down the hall. Classes and care for children six weeks through age four are funded through several programs, and all have a literacy-based focus to prepare these youngsters for success in school.

Regular sessions during the adult classes are set aside for parents to go into their child's classroom to interact during a literacy-based activity. "Family Fun Times" and field trips around Charleston periodically offer families the opportunity to learn together in a relaxed and entertaining setting. To round out the attention to the family unit, home visits are made regularly by a parent educator.



*Lawanda Johnson graduated in July 2006 after passing her GED exam at the Child & Family Development Center. She is now employed by a store in Charleston. Her daughter attends the center's Early Head Start program, where Lawanda is a very active mom.*

*(Continued next page)*

**\* DID YOU KNOW? 57 SC programs served Adult Education students in 2005-06.**





## CHILD & FAMILY DEVELOPMENT CENTER, NORTH CHARLESTON

*The key to retaining  
our Adult Ed students  
is building strong  
relationships...*

"To someone looking in, we appear to be a smooth lake, but really there's a lot of paddling and moving underneath the surface," Dr. Watson chuckled. One area of constant movement is coordinating the various partnerships which power the center.

"We can't run without the support of our community," she said. Partners include Trident United Way, Success By Six, First Steps, Trident Technical College, Charleston County School District, federally funded Head Start and Even Start programs,

local and regional grants and individual local schools. They provide funds as well as volunteer help.

A United Way grant, for instance, has provided book bags for each child to take home on Mondays, each full of books and materials to be enjoyed with parents at home until Friday when they are returned. The child chooses a new book bag on Mondays, and the process repeats.

Two issues are always at the forefront for Dr. Watson and her staff: recruitment and retention. "We don't wait for our families to come to us. We go out into the schools in our area, to their parent events and to their screenings for their pre-K programs to look for parents who need GEDs. We go to PTA meetings, orientations and the Charleston County First Day program with our recruitment materials." Head Start helps by referring potential students as identified by the family service associates.

Not surprisingly, the best recruiters are the Center's successful adult education students who tell friends and family about their accomplishments and encourage them to participate, she said.

And the success stories keep on coming. "This past year, our center had the state winner of adult education's annual \$500 scholarship. This student, Vera Polite, received her GED, and most important to her, she met a personal goal of getting her GED before her first child graduated from high school," the director said. In fact, the North Charleston center produces the second highest number of GED graduates in the area, second only to West Ashley High School.

As for retention, it's all about relationships. "We have found that the key to retaining our adult ed students is building strong relationships with them and their children. We go as far as it takes to meet them where they are to keep them engaged," Dr. Watson said.

Once they are involved, they in turn build friendships with each other as they go on field trips and learn together in class, she pointed out.

"I believe a country is defined by how it takes care of its people," Dr. Watson said thoughtfully. "Our most vulnerable citizens, our children and our elderly—they are everyone's responsibility. I think helping children by helping their families is the right thing to do, and I hope this emphasis continues and gets stronger in our state and nation." ✱

# It was finally her time.

WILHELMINA MCTILLMAN, GED GRADUATE

## FOR SOMEONE WHO DECLARES MATH HAS ALWAYS

given her problems, Wilhelmina McTillman seems happy to return each Tuesday evening to face her adversary.

In fact, she even volunteers to be there—at the Kershaw County ATEC building in the adult education weekly math class—because she wants to keep up her math skills and because she is happy to help others who are in the same situation she was in just a short time ago.

Wilhelmina received her GED certification in the May 2006 graduation ceremonies in Camden after successfully completing the exam in 2005. Her long-time foe, that dreaded math portion of the test, threatened to get the best of her, but Wilhelmina's story proves once again that determination is key.

"I tried to get my high school credential when my children were small, and it took until a couple of years ago when all the children were grown before I went back," she recalled. "My husband said, 'Go now! Everybody is out of the house. It's your turn!'"

She took the refresher courses and tackled the test, passing everything but—you guessed it—math that first time. It helps to understand how the rest of the test could come more easily for her, as she works full-time as a library service specialist at the Kershaw County Library. Being around all those books, getting to read often and helping patrons with check-outs and reference questions keep her love of literature and learning quenched.

But math, oh, that math. "When I first went in Susan Layton's math class, she was talking about how we would cover fractions, percentages, algebra, geometry. I didn't know she overheard me say to another class member, 'I didn't take this class to be a rocket scientist. I just want to pass the GED exam.' She did hear me and wouldn't let me slack off," laughed Wilhelmina.

She took that math exam again, and again, and again—four times. In this case, the fourth time was the charm. She did it! "I found out I have test anxiety. I would get to the test, read the questions and say 'I know this' but I would forget how to get to the answer," she acknowledged. "I just cried when I would find out I didn't pass."

The teachers and staff were pulling for her, she said, so "I didn't give up. I just told myself it wasn't my time yet." She also praised her husband and their six children for always being supportive.

This mother and grandmother made an important discovery along the way. She realized she had a learning disability that resulted in her forgetting how to do something once she learned it, if she didn't continue



*(Continued next page)*

**\* DID YOU KNOW? SC Adult Ed providers include school districts, community-based groups,**



WILHELMINA MCTILLMAN

## *Dreams don't end with your diploma. What do you want to do next?*

working on the skill. Hence her weekly return to the math class to stay up on that which comes the hardest for her.

"I was always a dreamer and just couldn't remember things I was exposed to in class," she said. Now, she knows that staying in practice on tasks like math means she keeps that expertise and does not lose what she has learned.

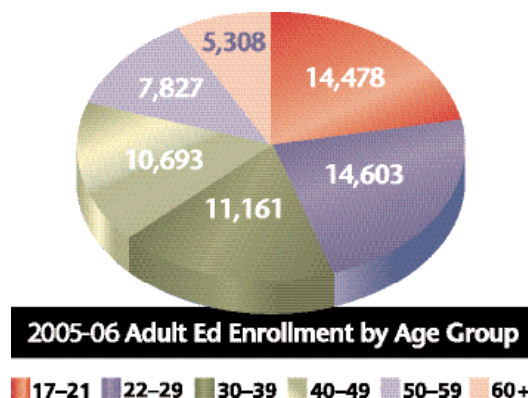
She also returns on Tuesdays to help her former teacher and encourage the students. "I want to give back to my community and help others like I was helped. I have had other students say that I have inspired them. They felt bad when they complained about what they couldn't do when they found out what I overcame to get my GED, finally," she said.

Wilhelmina, a native of Philadelphia who moved to Camden with her family in the early '90s, was the graduation speaker when she received her GED certificate. In her remarks, she cited that it took her a long time and that it would have been easy to quit. She told the audience about her four times around with the math exam. "Dreams don't end with your diploma," she counseled. "Follow your dreams. What do you want to do next?"

What started out as a momentous occasion became even more gratifying for Wilhelmina. As she sat on that graduation stage after her address, she was recognized with the evening's scholarship award presentation—a huge surprise for her.

Following her own advice, she plans to continue taking classes at the Camden campus of Central Carolina Technical College. "I would like to become a special ed teacher," she said. "I would like to work with students with learning disabilities. I would tell them, 'I once was in the same place you are now.'"

And, she no doubt will add, "It will be your time, if you just keep trying." \*





# Getting set for the future.

GET SET PROGRAM, COLUMBIA

**WITH TODAY'S RAPID CHANGES IN THE WORKPLACE,** employees must enhance their skills to remain effective on the job. Managers with the City of Columbia embraced this realization with "Get SET," an initiative to encourage and enroll employees who need high school credentials in the GED program.

"Get SET"—which stands for "Get Skills Enhancement Training"—was the vision of City Manager Charles Austin, who

*...employees gain a greater sense of self worth, and we are growing the capabilities of our city.*

could see many benefits to having a more highly trained workforce. The city manager explained that beginning in September 2003, the program provided the city with the opportunity to grow and develop talent from within.

"Get SET" represents an investment in the long-term stability of our workforce. It is our affirmation that each of our employees is valuable to the team," he said.

Having more qualified workers "expands employment opportunities for our employees, provides a way for them to meet their needs, enhances the city's operating performance and provides a higher level of employment as workers advance" in available city positions, explained Marshall Johnson, the training and development division administrator who coordinates "Get SET."

Working with Richland School District One's adult education program and the Greater Columbia Literacy Council, the program is a "win-win" for the city and the participants, she emphasized.

The program helps city employees participate in adult education classes with the goal of achieving GEDs while being paid their wages and attending three hours of class during the work week. Participants attend classes two mornings a week for an hour and a half and then head out to their jobs. Already, 18 employees have passed the GED exam and received their certification, and 17 more are currently enrolled.

The city approached this idea carefully and deliberately. Marshall said that a survey of employees was conducted to gauge levels of education—how many grades completed, what additional training received, etc.



**Elroy Carson, a metro water treatment plant employee with the City of Columbia, was recently presented his framed GED certificate by Mayor Bob Coble at a City Council meeting.**

(Continued next page)

**\* DID YOU KNOW? Total funding for SC Adult Education was \$25,589,111 for 2005-06.**



GET SET PROGRAM, COLUMBIA

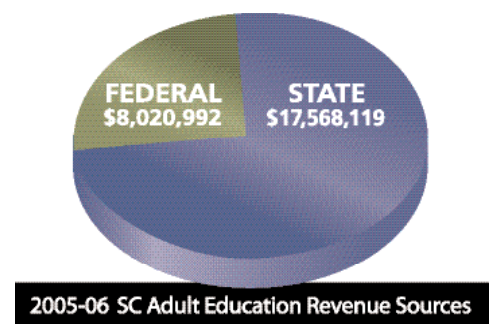
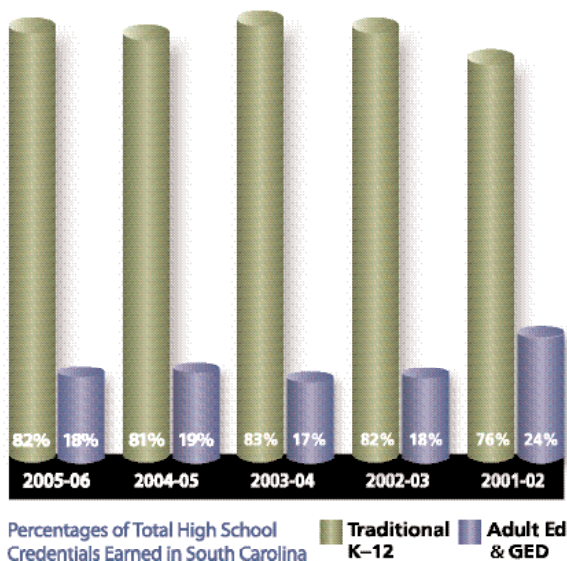
*...each of our employees is valuable to the team.*

"Then we asked who wanted to participate if we offered this option and then received a commitment from each one," she said. Next came assessments to determine each one's level of skill so that placements would be accurate.

In addition to paying tuition for the classes, the city covers books, materials and the initial fee to take the GED exam.

When the employee passes the GED, he or she also receives a one percent bonus to their pay. To congratulate them further, each successful student is presented his or her GED certificate, which the city has framed, by Mayor Bob Coble, City Council members and City Manager Austin at a City Council meeting.

"We are very proud of these individuals," Marshall said. "These employees gain a greater sense of self-worth, and we are growing the capabilities of our city." \*





## **2005–06 ANNUAL REPORT OF PROGRESS**

**Office of Adult and Community Education**

**South Carolina Department of Education**

■ Jim Rex, State Superintendent of Education

■ Cleo Richardson, Deputy Superintendent, Division of District and Community Services

■ Cherry Daniel, Director, Office of Adult and Community Education

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